

Washington, D.C. — Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7), a former 3-Star Admiral, released the following statement on the President's veto of H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act:

"President Bush is making a terrible and costly mistake by vetoing the war funding bill and rejecting the clear desire of Congress and the country to change the strategy in Iraq. Setting a goal for redeployment is the change we need, serving as the necessary leverage for Iraqis to assume responsibility for their nation and make the difficult political compromises that will stop the civil war we are currently refereeing.

On my recent trip to Iraq with Senator Hagel I heard from both senior military and political leaders who said that the debate on the United States redeploying has made the Iraqis more willing to accept responsibilities.

A goal for redeployment will also change regional nation's incentives toward stability, particularly Syria's and Iran's, when these nations will have to bear the consequences of further strife, with refugee flows to their countries, and the possibility that these relatively allied nations could then be joined into a proxy battle to their detriment, as one is primarily Sunni and the other Shia.

More importantly, redeployment will improve our defense security by allowing us to properly address other potential challenges around the world, from Afghanistan, North Korea, and Iran to the Western Pacific, the Horn of Africa, and the greater Middle East. In particular, it will allow us to put our attention back on Afghanistan and Pakistan and the fight against a resurgent al Qaeda and Taliban, the enemies who actually did engineer 9/11. And it will allow us to resolve the concerns about the readiness of our Armed Forces, which have been strained to the breaking point because of this Administration's careless management of the war in Iraq. Our men and women in uniform have served our country courageously and performed brilliantly — just as they always do. But asking them to stand between warring factions is not only unfair, it's counterproductive.

There is another strategy to bring about a stable Iraq, one where we will not be in Iraq and where we can begin to address our other security concerns that have been negatively impacted abroad and at home by our involvement in Iraq. This is why this vote on the supplemental was so important — and why the president's veto was so distressing."

President Bush vetoed H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act, on May 2, 2007.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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